Rechiar

(c. 415 – December 456)

BRIEFING

Rechiar or Flavius Rechiarius (after 415 – December 456) was the third Suevic king of Gallaecia, from 448 until his death, and also the first one to be born in Gallaecia. He was one of the most innovative and belligerent of the Suevi monarchs. Hydatius, the contemporary bishop and chronicler from Galicia who is the sole contemporary source for biographical details of Rechiar, established his reputation as that of a barbarian with little sense of Roman law, culture, or custom; accusations already discredited, but very common at that time. He was the first Germanic king who professed Nicene Christianity.

RELIGION

Rechiar was almost certainly not raised Christian, though some scholars have raised the contention that his father raised him that way in order to foster good relations with the Church and the Romanized population who were, for the most part, Catholics as well. What is certain is the Rechiar had been converted (*catholicus factus* according to Isidore's *Historia Suevorum*) before reaching the throne. Rechiar's conversion to Trinitarianism predated that of the more famous Clovis of the Franks by half a century. The argument was even raised in the late nineteenth century that the Spanish church had primacy over the French because Rechiar's conversion predated Clovis'. Rechiar was the son of the pagan Flavius Rechila, whom he succeeded on the throne, and a daughter of the Visigothic king Wallia. The date and circumstances of Rechiar's conversion are unknown and it is possible that Roman missionaries took some part in it, since he was not converted to the Arianism which was preached by the Visigothic missionaries. Rechiar was one of the only Suevi to convert at that time; also he preserved his ancestral beliefs and his people remained pagan. Hydatius records opposition, possibly secret, to his succession, but the basis of this opposition he does not mention. It is not inconceivable that it was religiously motivated.

Rechiar married an Arian Visigothic princess from Toulouse, the daughter of Theodoric I. The marriage of Catholic to Arian was not advantageous for the church of the former and the influence of Rechiar's queen and another later Arian queen helped bring about the conversion of the Suevi not to Catholicism, but to Arianism. If Rechiar did make any effort to convert his people to his faith, it was entirely ephemeral and "bore no detectable fruit".

ADMINISTRATION

Rechiar was a powerful enough ruler to mint his own coinage, on which he had stamped the legend *ivssv rechiari reges*. Indeed, he was the first Germanic king to mint coins (*siliquae*) bearing his name and the first to claim the right (*iussu*) to mint them, in Latin legend: "*IVSSV RECHIARI REGES*" ("By order of King Rechiar"). Rechiar's kingship was "primitive" enough, however, that it appears he took the royal *thesaurus* (treasure) with him on his campaigns. Despite Hydatius' misrepresentation of Rechiarius, he was the first Suevic king to be born in Gallaecia and with a Roman education, like many Gallico-Roman leaders of the time, thanks to which he also gained influence in the autochthonous social layers. He kept his capital at Braga.

WARS

Rechiar was a bellicose ruler, who made war on all of his neighbours. In 448, at the commencement of his reign, the Roman count Censorius was executed at Seville by a Suevic nobleman named Agiulf. It has been surmised by some that this act was connected with Rechiar's warlike attitude towards Rome. He even allied with the Bagaudae in ravaging the Ebro valley, a unique occurrence between Germanic rulers and local peasant rebels. Rechiar also impelled the first contact between the Suevi and the Basques: he made war on them in February 449. The expedition may have been a mere raid or an attempted conquest of Vasconia as a prelude to the conquest of the Ebro valley. Later in 449 he visited his father-in-law in Gaul. On his return home to Galicia, Rechiar allied with Basilius, leader of one of the Bagaudae, and raided the Ebro valley, attacking Caesaraugusta and even entering Ilerda (Lleida) "by a trick". He took many prisoners, but he failed to take the region and thus complete the Suevic conquest of Hispania. Rechiar did not approach Tarragona, the provincial capital.

Unlike his father-in-law, he did not take part in the battle of the Catalaunian Plains in 451.

Following the assassination of the patrician Flavius Aëtius and the emperors Valentinian III and Petronius Maximus in 455, Rechiar led an attack on Carthaginiensis, probably with the intent of conquest. Later that year he attacked the province of Hispania Tarraconensis, the only province of Hispania still under Roman control, but did not conquer it. According to Jordanes, he had "presumed" on the basis of his relationship to the Visigothic king and Roman *foederatus* Theodoric II (his brother-in-law), that he could rule all of Hispania. Theodoric, acting on the orders of the emperor Avitus, invaded Hispania in 456 with an army of Goths, Franks, Burgundians (under their kings Chilperic I and Gundioch), and perhaps even Romans to confront the Suevi, who in turn planned to meet the invaders on the borders of Tarraconensis.

On 5 October 456 Theodoric defeated Rechiar in a battle at the *Campus Paramus* twelve miles from Astorga on the *Urbicus* (Órbigo). He was wounded during the battle, but according to Hydatius managed to flee as far as Porto in the heart of his kingdom, while Jordanes says he took ship in the Tyrrhenian Sea (i.e., the western Mediterranean) before winds forced him back and he was captured. Jordanes is almost certainly wrong; at Porto Rechiar was captured and executed in December. The Suevic monarchy collapsed, rapidly disintegrating into rival factions over the following years. Braga fell on 28 October and the Visigoths brutally sacked the city and the churches before moving on to conquer Andalusia. During the century of Arianism that soon commenced, nothing about the Suevi was recorded.

AIOULF

Aioulf or **Ag(r)iwulf** (died June 457) was an obscure king of Galicia from 456. In 448, after eight years in captivity, the Roman ambassador Censorius was executed by one **Agiulf** at Seville (*Hispalis*). This Agiulf has sometimes been identified with Aioulf.

According to the local and contemporary chronicler Hydatius, after the sack of Braga and the execution of Rechiar, the previous Suevic king, by the Visigoths, the Gothic king, Theodoric II, led his army south into Lusitania while one of his commanders, Aioulf, deserted him and remained behind in Galicia hoping to make himself king of the Sueves there.

However, the later, Pannonian historian Jordanes records that Aioulf was a Warnic *cliens* (retainer) of Theodoric appointed by the king to administer the Suevi and who, being provoked by the Suevi themselves, sought to make himself king but was defeated by Theodoric's army in the first engagement, captured, and executed in Porto in June 457. According to E. A. Thompson, Jordanes is less reliable than Hydatius for three reasons: he lived further away both in time and space from events in Galicia, his record for accuracy is less reputable, and his bias for the Goths led him to make the disloyal Aioulf a Warni and to involve the Suevi themselves in the act of betraying Theodoric. More significantly, however, Jordanes mentions the Suevic bishops being greeted by Theodoric "with the reverence due to episcopal rank (*pontificali reverentia*)", an anachronism considering the Suevi were pagans in 457.

After Aioulf, the Suevi chose Remismund to be their king and he was accepted by Theodoric.

MALDRAS

Maldras (or **Masdras**) (died February 460) was the Suevic king of Galicia from 456 until his death. After the execution of Rechiar by the victorious Visigoths, the Suevi are said to have established Maldras on the throne. During his reign the Suevic nation became fragmented.

Maldras was the son of Massilia (or Massila) and was not said to be related to the dynasty of Hermeric, which had ruled the Suevi since 406. The wording of the contemporary chronicler Hydatius may be taken to signify that the Suevi population had some part in electing Maldras. They certainly had a part in dividing the kingdom in 457, when part of them refused to accept him as their leader and chose instead Framta. The two Suevic kings acted independently and on Framta's death within a few months his followers are found led by Rechimund, though scholars dispute whether or not the two parties rejoined.

In 457, while Framta was still ruling, Maldras led his people in a large raid on Lusitania. They sacked Lisbon by pretending to come in peace and, once admitted by the citizens, plundering the city. Maldras is also accused of having murdered his brother. In 458 he received envoys from the Visigoths and the Vandals.

His people continued to plunder western Lusitania until Maldras was strangled, perhaps by his own men, in February 460. Maldras' people turned to Frumar as their war-leader then. Afterwards Remismund became king and reunited the Suevic people. He is claimed by Isidore of Seville to be a son of Maldras, but there is some doubt on this.